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Assessment of medical students' readiness for professional practice

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Why was the idea necessary (Problem)

Nelson Mandela University's Medical School aims to graduate the 'Mandela Doctor' - a caring, competent healthcare professional committed to service. Central to this is the development of a fit-for-purpose generalist, focused on primary healthcare-oriented medicine and aligned with the Medical and Dental Board core competencies for undergraduate students.[1] While these competencies are foundational to the curriculum, effective tools to assess and promote roles other than health care practitioner remain limited.

To address this gap, the Medical School introduced a Readiness for Professional Practice (RPP) paper-based tool in 2024, enabling clinicians to assess four of these roles - Communicator, Collaborator, Scholar and Professional - in undergraduate medical students on the clinical platform. This tool was adapted from the Graduate Attributes Scoring Rubric developed by Stellenbosch University's Rural Clinical School, (Coetzee F, personal email communication, 2023 Aug 18). However, many clinicians reported difficulty applying the descriptors and did not consistently recognise the tool's role in fostering professionalism or enabling early identification and support of students experiencing difficulties. In addition, the tool was completed by a single end-of-rotation assessor, limiting opportunities for meaningful, individualised feedback.

What will be tried (Approach)

The A RICH features of entrustment decisions comprise Accountability, Respect, Integrity, Compassion, and Humilit.[2] These features also underpin the professional standards expected of graduates and are integral to fostering trust and empathy in patient care. Accordingly, we redesigned the RPP tool by integrating the A RICH features (Table 1). The revised version provides structured descriptors of excellence for each feature across the respective roles, offering clearer guidance to clinicians when assessing observed behaviours. The tool will be utilised as a 360-degree evaluation to incorporate feedback from various healthcare providers with whom the student has interacted.[3] This approach aims to enhance the reliability and validity of the assessment while strengthening feedback. To streamline submission and improve accessibility, responses will be collected electronically and collated for feedback to individual students. By making the features of these roles more visible, identifiable and assessable, the revised tool aims to promote the professional development of the medical students.

What will be learnt (Anticipated Outcomes)

More meaningful assessment of the roles of Communicator, Collaborator, Scholar and Professional is anticipated. The structured, descriptive criteria should enhance clinicians' clarity and confidence in assessing professional behaviours. Use of the tool will reinforce the centrality of these roles in the minds of both students and clinicians. The addition of A RICH features, with relatable descriptors, is expected to promote more individualised feedback from the clinicians and to better identify students in need of support, enabling earlier and more targeted intervention.

Future steps will include training initiatives for clinicians to ensure consistent use of the tool, as well as a formal evaluation of its effectiveness. Broadening the concept of entrustment decisions to include assessment of roles beyond that of medical practitioner, within the clinical environment, has the potential to contribute meaningfully to the professional identity formation of the 'Mandela Doctor' envisioned by the Nelson Mandela University Medical School.

Declaration. None.

Data availability statement. This article describes the development of an assessment tool. No research data were collected, and therefore no datasets are available.

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Table 1. Readiness for Professional Practice Tool

Student name:	**Student number:**				
Instructions: If the student fulfils the expected performance of a 6th-year student, the middle box is ticked. If the student underperforms or exceeds expectations the relevant box is ticked, and some explanatory notes are added at the end in the comment box.					
	Major Concerns (1)	**Below Expectations (2)**	**Meets Expectations (3)**	**Above Expectations (4)**	**Exceptional (5)**
COMMUNICATOR **Agency:** Proactively initiates patient conversations and addresses concerns to support care. **Reliability:** Communicates clearly and consistently with patients and team members to ensure shared understanding. **Integrity:** Communicates with honesty and empathy while maintaining confidentiality. **Capability:** Adapts communication style effectively to different clinical settings and situations. **Humility:** Listens actively, encourages patient questions and clarification, and acknowledges own limitations.					
COLLABORATOR **Agency:** Actively contributes to group tasks and promotes teamwork. **Reliability:** Dependable and consistent team member **Integrity:** Respects team members and their contributions. **Capability:** Applies clinical knowledge and understands interprofessional boundaries. **Humility:** Values others' input and seeks help when needed.					
SCHOLAR **Agency:** Independently seeks learning opportunities and takes initiative. **Reliability:** Prepares consistently and completes academic tasks with care. **Integrity:** Maintains academic honesty across all learning contexts. **Capability:** Applies clinical reasoning and integrates evidence effectively. **Humility:** Actively seeks and uses feedback to improve.					
PROFESSIONAL **Agency:** Takes ownership of professional growth by setting goals and seeking mentorship. **Reliability:** Punctual, meets deadlines, and fulfils clinical responsibilities. **Integrity:** Acts ethically and consistently respects patient dignity. **Capability:** Applies clinical skills professionally across diverse settings. **Humility:** Acknowledges limitations and uses feedback to improve.					
Total Score	/20				
Feedback/ Comments:					
Assessed by:	Date:				